

VZCZCXRO0944

RR RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHDA RUEHDF RUEHFL RUEHIK RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHLN  
RUEHLZ RUEHPOD RUEHROV RUEHSR RUEHVK RUEHYG  
DE RUEHVB #0468 1751137  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 231137Z JUN 08  
FM AMEMBASSY ZAGREB  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8421  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBW/AMEMBASSY BELGRADE 0006  
RUEHLJ/AMEMBASSY LJUBLJANA 6415  
RUEHPOD/AMEMBASSY PODGORICA  
RUEHPS/AMEMBASSY PRISTINA 0593  
RUEHVJ/AMEMBASSY SARAJEVO 0286  
RUEHTI/AMEMBASSY TIRANA 0832

UNCLAS ZAGREB 000468

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR PRM, EUR/SCE AND EUR/RPM, BELGRADE FOR REFCOORD  
JIKICH

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [HR](#) [CROATIA](#) [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [EUC](#) [REFUGEES](#)

SUBJECT: GOC COMMITTED TO PROVIDING HOUSING TO RETURNEES,  
BUT UNLIKELY TO HIT ITS TARGET DATE OF THE END OF 2009

REF: A. ZAGREB 00411

[1](#)B. ZAGREB 00357

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Deputy Prime Minister Slobodan Uzelac continues his active engagement (REFS) to address outstanding refugee return issues in Croatia. During a June 16th, 2008 meeting between senior representatives of the European Commission, UNHCR, U.S. Embassy, and the Zagreb based office of the OSCE, the DPM further outlined the GoC "action plan" for the accelerated implementation of the housing care program. In addition to the GoC's (overly) ambitious plan to solve the cases of approximately 5600 former occupancy tenancy right holders by the end of 2009, discussions during the bi-monthly meeting with the international community also focused on the quality of housing provided to returnees, a new appellate procedure for housing care applications, and unresolved property matters. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) Uzelac openly acknowledged that, as of early June 2008, the GoC had only actually delivered just under 85 percent of the 1400 returnee apartments it had set as its target for 2007. The remaining 217 units had been acquired, but were not yet ready for occupancy. Uzelac assured the representatives of the international community that the majority of these 217 units would be ready by the end of September. Uzelac added that the GoC's draft "Action Plan on Returns" is currently under discussion with the EU as a required benchmark for opening a chapter in Croatia's accession negotiations. Uzelac said the GoC is scheduled to provide solutions by the end of 2009 to the estimated 5600 additional households of former occupancy tenancy rights holders who have applied for housing. Given the generally inconsistent quality of housing provided to returnees, the GoC committed itself to begin repairs on units that are in poorer condition.

[1](#)3. (U) Uzelac noted that the GoC has recently implemented a new appellate procedure. Staff from the central Ministry for Reconstruction and UNHCR's Zagreb office are now jointly reviewing applications originally rejected by the GoC's local offices. A number of these rejections are likely to be overturned by the end of October. Those cases in which the joint review committee upheld the initial rejection will still have recourse to a further appeals process. GoC officials noted that cases approved during this appellate procedure by September will be added to the 2009 plan and budget accordingly. Meeting participants praised the GoC's willingness to undertake this review as a sign of political will to address any injustices caused by unfairly restrictive

decisions at the local level.

¶4. (U) Uzelac also assured the representatives of the international community that of an estimated 8,600 pending requests for housing reconstruction, funds have already been ear-marked in the government budget for all positive decisions that will be issued in the months ahead. Uzelac, who recently traveled to Vojvodina to meet with refugees in Serbia who have applied for return to Croatia, further stated his belief that a bilateral approach to negotiations with Serbia is a logical way to proceed in further promoting return to Croatia.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: While the "Action Plan" is encouraging and clearly demonstrates the GoC's willingness to "do the right thing," the timetables the GoC has outlined for resolving these cases strike us as overly ambitious. Based on the GoC's performance over the past eighteen months, we believe that the GoC does genuinely intend to provide housing to all approved applicants for return. But it is very unlikely that Uzelac and the GoC can actually deliver all of the approximately 5600 units required by the end of 2009. END  
COMMENT  
Bradtke